

Press Briefing
BGeneral Winant Sidle
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MACV

Now I would like to bring General Sidle up here to discuss the memorandum you had yesterday.

General Sidle: I was going to wear a flak jacket, but I couldn't find one in a hurry. But I do want to explain this a little bit, because I think that what has happened is that the newcomers -- and we have an awfully lot -- who have come here since September don't realize that all this memorandum does actually confirms what Major Coronado and I tried to put across last September at the time of Con Thien on a couple of evenings, and in view of the continuing turn over of ~~names~~ in the press it seemed wise to get this in writing and then we can all understand each other on what we are trying to do.

Now for those of you who were here in September, you will realize this problem came up in connection with Con Thien specifically, and the idea was that we wanted to deny to the enemy any information that (1) he couldn't get at all unless we gave him, or (2) it would take him a while to get it. There is no point to give it to him today when it takes him 10 days to get it. There just is not much point in giving him that much help.

Now what I would like to point out that that there is -- first of all, we are only talking about fixed positions in this thing. I've had a number of queries today about what happens if we are at Dak To. This is not the point. What we call the normal type of operation is not affected by this memorandum at all. It's just the attacks on a fixed position and a position where the enemy either has no way of learning what happens or has a delayed way of learning what happens. Let's take the first case, first. Khe Sanh is of course a big example as Con Thien was last September.

The enemy really has no way of determining accurately what casualties are suffered by his shelling unless we tell him. Therefore, it seems kind of silly to tell him. This also applies to equipment losses and many other things.

I didn't mean to infer by this memorandum that we weren't going to say roughly how many rounds came in or anything like that, and we are certainly going to have to make some kind of an explanation of casualties, such as light, moderate, or heavy or something of that nature, but we just can't afford to let him know how accurate or inaccurate he is with his shelling. As those of you who have been in the Army or Marines know, there is a great deal in attacking a fixed position with different type of artillery, or rockets or mortars. Some are more effective than others and in some cases, some installations around this country there is no way for the enemy to even know if he's hit it or not unless we say it. So we have to approximate the incoming rounds, and

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we just don't want to give out any real details as to results. That's really how simple it is.

Someone asked the question what about Tan Son Nhut. That falls in the other category. We all know that the enemy's intelligence is certainly good enough that he can over a period of time determine reasonably well what the materiel casualty is. Again he won't know too much about the personnel. You probably have noticed since Con Thien, we have not specified in great detail the results of rocketing of air fields and this is the reason.

All I was doing in this memo was to put all this down in writing, and throw it on the table and we discuss it. I think most of you will agree that neither the press nor the military want to give the opposition an unnecessary edge through this type of reporting.

One more point I should make. I was called by several people last night, asking what about if you are on the scene, can you report what you see. I think if you analyze that, the answer is almost completely yes, because in most cases you aren't going to be able to see the entire results. If you are sitting in a bunker and it gets hit and you are killed -- it's hard to report that -- but at least you could if you weren't killed. As far as overall casualties go, this is what we don't want to put out.

Question: Let's take this one point further, Si. Since AP has a man in Khe Sanh. In a sense he is then under a kind of censorship. He cannot report what he can hear from the S-2 or the S-3 or from some of the troops or by counting the casualties that go aboard an aircraft.

General Sidle: Many things of this nature in our ground rules already.

Question: But they never have been enforced, and this presumably is going to be enforced.

General Sidle: I hope so, yes.

Question: Do the guys in the field know this?

General Sidle: We're spreading this on. I'm not going to be unreasonable naturally. Those of you who know me, know. We just can't afford to be so cotton-pickin' helpful to the enemy is what it amounts to.

Question: (Something about following the same rules as the Vietnamese.)

General Sidle: This I can't say. This is a unilateral U. S.

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Question: You don't expect them to follow your rules.

General Sidle: I really don't have an opinion.

Question: In the case of the rocketing a few days ago, we could go out there, we went out there, we could film the aircraft that were damaged. I knew how many aircraft were damaged. Could I do the same thing under these new ground rules?

General Sidle: We would not, of course, have any objection to your filming damaged aircraft or things of that nature. All this is pointed at is total. I don't know if you had the right total or not. That's a pretty big place.

Question: My point is that you could count the total of F-4s that were totally wrecked; you could count the number of transports.

General Sidle: This is the kind of thing I'm talking about.

Question: Could we now say there are 8 planes badly or totally destroyed?

General Sidle: Again I have to go back to the basic principle. We don't want to put out accurate totals. This does not mean that we want to keep you out from looking at this thing at all.

Question: What would we say under those conditions?

General Sidle: I think you would have to say with some adjective, such as 5 to 10, 2 to 3, heavy, light, or moderate, or whatever we're saying on it, but you would go on to use the film. We wouldn't want to be that hard-nosed about it.

Question: What you will say is either light, medium or heavy. And it almost always is light considering Tan Son Nhut or Bien Hoa.

General Sidle: This would be normal -- the light, medium or heavy part.

Question: Could I ask a question, Si? I think one of the things that interests us most is in case . . . a reporter is right there in a historic ground attack, will that be reported. There seems to be no reason why . . .

General Sidle: Remember what I'm talking about, is shelling of fixed installations.

Question: (Unintelligible -- everyone had a coughing fit.) The wires are carrying something about casualties.

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General Sidle: I'll be glad to talk to you about this in private. That happens to be a special case. We shouldn't apply it to this rule at all. It's a completely special case, which I can't discuss in public.

Question: It won't be the rule?

General Sidle: No, absolutely not. No. Ground action is good action, the enemy has an estimate of how many they killed as well as we do.

Question: Last September when we had a read out on Con Thien, there were some over-zealous types who also applied this to moving units, and we killed that as you might remember.

General Sidle: No, I think it is interesting to bring up Con Thien because as you recall, there was lot of doubt on your part about that but it worked out pretty well I thought.

Question: We're not going to have a passion for knocking down everything?

General Sidle: It's not my intent, certainly.

Question: Through your channels?

General Sidle: No, absolutely not.

Question: Let's take an example. In the last shelling of fixed installations at Tan Son Nhut where 20 rocket rounds allegedly were fired into the base. There was a wide range of targets. One of them hit a Vietnamese house which is a quarter mile away from the base. It killed a dozen civilians. It probably is impossible for the enemy to know which of their rounds were on target, and which were grossly in error. In that attack it was reported that no planes were destroyed, and 4 airmen were killed. It might have been the other way around, no airmen killed and 4 airplanes destroyed. What difference would it make in our reporting 4 aircraft were destroyed when they were firing so many rounds, hitting such a wide area?

General Sidle: This is a tough question because it depends a great deal on how the attack is conducted. There are certain to be instances where they can't tell the difference. We hope in those circumstances that we'll be able to give you something of that nature. But if they fire them in particular sequence, or a particular area, so that you can tell they know what they're shooting at, then we have to be very careful with it. We don't plan as I say, we don't plan to refuse to admit it was shot at and give you a rough estimate of the rounds, but for instance if you listened to AFVN the other night, on one of those attacks they were announcing where the rounds hit. It's kind of like letting the Viet Cong adjust the fire over AFVN. We can't go for that and won't want this going

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over the press wire. It gets up to Hanoi pretty quick, too, but not that quick.

Question: These aren't being fired from fixed gun positions, so what possible long-range value could it have to the enemy? At Con Thien the problem was you had a point in not telling them where they were shooting so they could adjust their guns, but if you have a hit and run attack you don't have this thing.

General Sidle: It depends on how good their artillery data is. I don't know how much they survey in, or what?

Question: If you have rockets or mortars at a place like Tan Son Nhut, these are, let's hope, temporary type. I don't see how really you're helping them or not helping them by talking about the results.

General Sidle: Well, you are. The artilleryman's problem is one of determining not only his accuracy, but the type of weapon, the effectiveness of the two types, the three types, he may be using. There's a definite help to him on this. Here, just to run that thing into the ground and say, I think Tan Son Nhut is about that way and pull the trigger. He surveys in from where he's shooting from. He does the best he can with the materials he has available to do a controlled fire. Fortunately, that rocket has a wide range power there, but that doesn't mean you can't do a great deal with it. During World War II, we had to fire World War I ammunition, you may recall, for a while. After we had fired several thousand rounds of it, we got pretty good with it. So I say, that doesn't hold up.

Question: What are the effective ground rules if I went to Khe Sanh and learned that 14 killed, and your release says casualties are light; what can I say?

General Sidle: You learned accurately there were 14?

Question: By wandering into the G-1.

General Sidle: This is what we don't want to put out. That is right.

Question: I want to know what the rules are.

General Sidle: Yes, absolutely, that's the thing we don't want to put out. Now, for instance, on incoming rounds at Khe Sanh. We had a question on this today. Suppose you estimate there were a thousand rounds came in. Well, we wouldn't care if you said the reporter estimated, or the estimates were that a thousand rounds came in and hit in the general area, or something like that. There's no problem with that. That's what we'll put out, as a matter of fact.

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The only problem is that we might have a different estimate, but that's quite logical, you and somebody next to you might have a different estimate. But we plan to put out that.

Question: What are the limitations? What can we not say?

General Sidle: What we don't want you to put out is exact results. And it's that simple.

Question: In other words, if the rocket round hit the S-1 shop at Khe Sanh, would we say that?

General Sidle: I don't see anything wrong with that. If you say it yourself. This doesn't give overall results. Of course saying S-1 shack wouldn't be right.

Question: Suppose they hit the operations bunkers?

General Sidle: You obviously wouldn't say that.

Question: Then what would we say?

General Sidle: What I was trying to explain was that details, little bits of details that you observed which don't paint the big picture, would normally be all right. But when you say the operations center, that's of course something else again.

Question: What's the difference? In other words, you can say a bunker was smashed, but . . .

General Sidle: We haven't had any trouble -- You've all been very good about this in the past. I didn't see any need to put that in. Everybody knows that. . .

Question: They don't. You keep saying there are new people here . . .

General Sidle: O.K. Touche.

Question: What time frame are we talking about? How long is it going to take to put this stuff out if we have a man on the scene?

General Sidle: I hope to get it out to all the IOs in the field to give to the correspondents in the field not later than tomorrow night. I've already sent it out.

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Question: That would be 24 hours. In the case of the television guys, there's a delay of at least 48 hours before it gets on the air anyway but you commit yourself on the scene as to what you've said. That's the whole point.

General Sidle: It's not the whole point. It's not on a permanent basis. At least if I understand your question correctly.

Question: What I'm talking about is if a man at Khe Sanh sees something and he says what he sees, but then 24 hours later it doesn't come out in your release, then he has violated your rule.

General Sidle: No, we're going to put out in our release. I thought we had covered this question already as a result of Bob's question, but what we don't want you to put out is, as I said, is exact results. I don't care whether he's at Khe Sanh and it gets to New York 48 hours later or not, he shouldn't be putting out exact results. We're not going to put them out either that day or the next, so that your guys shouldn't be putting them out either.

Question: Would you put in written form some of these things that cannot be done so everyone will be equal? Some people will say I didn't understand and will

General Sidle: As a matter of fact. . . You don't understand?

Question: No. I don't understand what's to prevent you from saying, total results. Suppose you see something, and you determine that that's. . .

General Sidle: That's part of the ground rules. That's under the normal ground rules. This is . . .

Question: One round, and it hits something and the total results . . .

General Sidle: I don't recall anyone in this room, or at any time since I've been here, writing a story that has been really damaging by saying that some key portion of the installation was demolished.

Question: At Khe Sanh - Con Thien - A B-52. Some people reported it, some people didn't.

General Sidle: That's right. I'd forgotten about that one. But I don't think that should have been reported, but this isn't part of the rule I'm talking about. Tom's question a minute ago really hinges on the other ground rules. All I'm talking about in this thing is total results, in other words, telling the enemy how good or how bad his shooting was. Anyone is going to get a lucky hit out of anything, but my feeling is that it isn't in the rules spelled out, but I would

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feel that you yourselves would not want to give away something that is really vital.

Question: Can you make your rule more specific?

General Sidle: I can. As a matter of fact, it's already being worked on. I'm going to try to give all the ground rules. Restate them all, with as many examples as I can think of so that we are all on the same track and when I get through with that I'll come down and we can kick that around. Before I put it out, that is.

Question: For example, a month ago one of the rounds at Khe Sanh hit and destroyed the ammo dump. That's a specific result. We could report that. Now, say, tomorrow that 300 rounds and one of them hit the operations center and destroyed it, that is an important news story to us.

General Sidle: It's important to the enemy, too. I've been doing a little wishful thinking here, because our ground rules don't specifically forbid this, but it's just plain.

Question: Then there was a first-aid station. It's a question of what you report and don't report.

General Sidle: It's a good question and I see where I will have to spell this out a little more.

Question: To get realistic, in the case of Khe Sanh, it is under total and complete visual observation by the enemy, they have hill positions that overlook it. They must have gotten the location of all major installations well established by now, so in fact if they do hit a command bunker, they ought to know it just by looking through their field glasses.

General Sidle: On a command bunker, you are probably right, but it's very questionable how much they know of the internal details. And, of course, this doesn't apply at all to the casualties.

Question: Have you ever tried to do that from the other side? It's not as easy as it sounds?

General Sidle: O. K. , thank you very much.

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